DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 392 108 CS 509 206

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TITLE Forensic Evolution: Influences upon Local Program Development.
PUB DATE 19 Nov 95
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (81st, San Antonio, TX, November 18-21, 1995).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - General (140) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audience Awareness; Change Strategies; *Debate; Higher Education; *Persuasive Discourse; Program Development; Speech Instruction; *Student Development
IDENTIFIERS Debate Coaches

ABSTRACT

Forensic program alumni returning for reunions or speech tournaments sometimes find difficulty in keeping pace with changing forensics practices and procedures. Elements influencing the evolutionary process in forensics include: a growing number of debate philosophy formats, bringing diversity in competitive options; expansion of standard individual event choices; and continued experimentation with new and creative speech, interpretation, and debate tournaments. The separate but often united functions of director and coach exert significant influence on local programs. Decisions regarding team inclusion and the relationship of a program with its publics comprise essential philosophical elements. Entry level participation and the use of public forums enhance student development and program growth and stability. Funding and team commitment are strong influences on program development. Further evaluation is needed in determining specific dimensions for local programs, in the roles of educators in forensic growth and in the concept of success and analyzation of winning and reward in educational forensics. Finally, as forensic teams search for funding to meet increasing expenses, those who direct local programs must increase their roles to include advocacy, fundraising, and scrutiny of alternatives in seeking to provide rewarding experiences for time and dollars invested. (Contains 11 references.) (CR)

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Forensic Evolution:

Influences upon Local Program Development

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Paper presented at the Eighty-first Annual Meeting
of the Speech Communication Association

November 19, 1995

San Antonio, Texas

CS 509206

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Forensic Evolution:
Influences upon Local Program Development

When alumni of the forensic program that I direct return for campus visits, the annual banquet, or to assist with speech tournaments, speakers of the past enjoy recalling how the "competitive speech world" operated in their particular day. With entertaining descriptions of judges and embellished accounts of final rounds, questions directed to the current coaching staff include: "Why are today's tournaments so expensive and why do they last so long?" Others ask: "Why must you have different kinds of debate with multiple resolutions?" Still others summarize their philosophical reactions by noting that forensics continues to change so quickly that team alumni have difficulty in keeping pace with the activity.

In response to puzzling inquiries, I often warn departing graduates and guests not to expect the forensic practices and procedures that they leave to be in operation when they return for reunions or tournaments. They can, however, influence responses and changes that local programs must make in confronting challenges from within and without the forensic community.

As this manuscript will illustrate, forensic programs experience evolution; and forces of change impact the activity, particularly programs at local levels. Thus, a specific purpose of this essay is to explore elements that continue to influence the evolutionary process. To clarify a beginning focus for discussion, one should note that dictionaries identify evolution as an ongoing process. The concept also represents the act of unfolding, developing, and forming that signals the growth-change of events or positions.

With the conceptualization of forensics within an evolutionary format, directional questions are helpful: Specifically, can major trends or forces be delineated that affect change and survival of forensic programs? Additionally, and importantly, can these influences provide pedagogical reminders that are important for speech educators in shaping their programs and the discipline of forensics? With these queries providing a framework, discussion is now directed toward identifying and clarifying influential factors.

Forensic Options

Diversity in forensic options has certainly emerged as a growing evolutionary force in the development of forensics at local levels. In fact, the later part of this century has seen a growing number of debate-philosophy formats, the expansion of standard individual event choices, and continued

experimentation with new and creative speech, interpretation, and debate tournament offerings.

While this discussion cannot explore detailed reasons underlying competitive diversity, observation of the impact of changes and transitions is certainly important in understanding the ongoing evolutionary process. Just as the early literary societies and honorary fraternities sparked and sponsored interest in academic debating, organizational practices of today initiate change, raise pedagogical questions, and even advocate the rejection of some forensic practices. In short, forensics as an activity is far more diverse and multidimensional than it appeared at the mid-point of this century. Austin Freely, reflecting changes at work in 1989, recalled an era of simplicity when he described the forensic climate of 1954. He observed: "There was no conflict between NDT and CEDA there was just debate" (pp. 4-5). Likewise, he noted, "there was no conflict between debate and I. E." (p. 5).

Diversity within the forensic community of the past two decades has been especially influential upon local program development. Not only are more choices available in competitive individual events and especially in debate, but increased options now require decision making by local programs that was not previously necessary. Additionally, choices often require determination of particular goals or pedagogical decisions in the exercise of choices. Certainly, as new organizations, practices and educational positions

emerge, local programs must decide how they will chart the directions of their teams and the expenditure of resources.

One specific change affecting local programs in recent years has been the growth of individual event involvement. With the accelerating costs accompanying individual event development and the inclusion of more and more students, some forensic teams have elected to make the transition from balanced programs offering debate and individual speech-interpretation competition to a focus upon individual events. As Mary Ann Danielson and Ann Burnett Pettus observed in 1990, "nearly half of the programs that currently offer only individual events used to offer debate as well" (p. 10). Significantly, the research of these educators notes that "in the past five years, many schools have had to make choices regarding the direction of their program, and most directors seem to have selected individual events as the activity they will continue to sponsor" (p. 10).

The very recent trend of incorporating one or more debate options in a tournament schedule of manageable length may allow some programs that have diminished debate to return to a more "total" or comprehensive speech and debate emphasis. For example, programs that find a tournament offering a full schedule of CEDA and/or NDT far too demanding for team members involved in debate and speech events may be able to unite individual competition with options such as Lincoln Douglas or Parliamentary Debate. The current AFA calendar (1995-96) gives evidence of this growing trend of

incorporation by listing at least forty-five tournaments that include Parliamentary Debate and seventy-nine listing one or more types of Lincoln Douglas (pp. 1-17).

Thus, the diversity that is available to forensic teams contributes to continued evolution of local programs. In a sense, directors and teams have an increasing variety of academic-forensic "products" from which they can and must choose. They can also select, change and modify choices according to their needs, goals, and limitations of resources.

The Coaching-Directing Factor

The coaching-directing dimension must be recognized as a pivotal influence in the evolution of local programs. Although forensic educators and/or peer coaches are perceived differently by each member of a particular team, they comprise a major force in charting a program's success. Indeed, despite occasional tendencies of some students and school administrators to overstate or understate the role of forensic leadership, programs are often associated with particular coaching-directing practices and histories.

Certainly, coaching that affects a program's evolution involves more than merely hearing and responding to selections and speeches. Regardless of their experience, coaches have opportunities to deal with myriad dimensions that influence a program's accomplishments, survival, or even failure. Forensic educators Regina Kostoff and Suzanne McKeever (1989), setting forth essential topics in training

graduate assistant coaches, mention factors such as time management, objectivity, discipline, motivation, and team building as helpful areas for discussion and training (p. 101). Such topics certainly introduce a range of dimensions that are vital in developing coaching proficiency, and they reveal the far-reaching responsibilities linked with coaching as a professional activity. In essence, if the forensic staff is able to blend training, individual responsibility, and team cohesiveness, coaching can be productive and thus influence a team's positive evolution. If the forensic staff does not hold high standards and communicate goals effectively, negative experiences and results contribute to a program's stagnation and decline.

The coaching variable in local program evolution often depends upon the strength of examples. In establishing standards for performance, promoting educational-ethical values, and in interacting with students, the instructor-coach provides a model for developing programs and participants. In reality, the directional force of a team's evolution is often centered in the coaching staff. Speaking of the lasting influence of forensic coaching upon developing students, Hefling (1989) stresses that the personal example frequently becomes the enduring force of the forensic experience. He notes:

> We [coaches] need to be ever mindful that our students are ever watchful. They may no longer exhibit the pre-school kind of adoration that elementary

> children frequently display, but the watchful attitude remains just the same. p. 90

In essence, he says, "what we really teach is ourselves" (p. 90).

The significant influence of forensic leadership upon local programs is highlighted by observing the separate but often united functions of director and coach. Although the concepts overlap and one educator may certainly fulfill functions of directing and coaching, the leadership role of the director includes opportunities and obligations in influencing a local program's evolution. The dedicated director understands the summation of Faules, Rieke and Rhodes when they note:

> A director is more than a coach. A director must be, often simultaneously, coach, administrator, counselor, scholar, and teacher. The unifying characteristic of the director's responsibility often seems to be the necessity for decision-making: budget requests, public debate appearances, colleague pairings, selection of materials for interpretation, practice session assignments, and the number and types of tournaments to attend are just a few examples of the variety of decisions the director faces. (p. 69)

Hence, the role of the director, whether filled by a single educator in a small program or by the individual who leads a much larger organization, remains critical to a program's evolution and success. The observation of Faules and his

colleagues remains insightful when they contend that "the stability, nature, size, style, and success of the program rest with the director" (p. 69).

Philosophy and Inclusiveness

The philosophy underlying a forensic team becomes a close parallel to coaching-directing as an influence in program evolution. Indeed, no factor is more directly linked to a program's survival and adaptability than the philosophy that the forensic staff and team share and implement together. As Ron Allen, Clay Willmington and Jo Sprague (1991) observe, "every forensic program reflects a philosophy, whether or not the director has taken the time to articulate one" (p. 389). These authors also explain that "the decisions that a forensics director makes in establishing and maintaining a program constitute a philosophy of forensics" (p. 389).

In addition to the influential forces highlighted within this paper, decisions regarding team inclusion and the relationship of a program with its publics comprise essential philosophical elements. Specifically, my position as a forensic educator is that decisions influencing the how and why of student recruitment are critical. While educators should be applauded for setting high standards and recruiting talented speakers, decisions regarding opportunities for students who are new to forensics have particular impact upon a program's philosophy and practices.

As noted in a prior position paper (1991), my firm contention is that forensics has the opportunity to be unique in comparison to many other activities in higher education. While some co-curricular and extracurricular enterprises assume or even require years of prerequisite experience, forensics allows entry level participation and offers "rich possibilities for student development at a variety of levels" (p. 9). In the Southwest Baptist program, for example, at least forty percent of the present team members have no high school competitive experience, and the team actively recruits speakers without prior tournament exposure. Certainly, a team's policy toward openness and its sense of "academic mission" become key elements in its philosophy and evolution.

My experience continues to affirm that a speech program evolves as a stable co-curricular activity as it increases its audience awareness and diversity. Likewise, if the activity isolates itself, experiences of speakers are limited, and training can actually develop around unrealistic premises. In his call for debate to function as a public entity, Robert Weiss (1994) identifies "abundant and useful" feedback, "the revitalization of the public sphere," and "the fact that debate conducted from a public perspective draws upon a rich heritage for standards and criticism" as values of the practice (pp. 4-5). Certainly, these benefits can apply to the totality of forensics as students communicate speeches and literary works in a wide variety of public forums as well as in tournament settings.

Conceptualization of Success

A program's conceptualization of success, and especially its attitude toward winning, must also be identified as a factor in a forensic team's evolution. Often, annual achievement goals for individual and team performance are established as standards and/or measurements that influence program sponsorship, continuity, and growth. Such goals may be determined by the coaching staff, they may be acquired by students as they interact with competitors from other institutions, or they can be mandated by the tradition of a particular program.

The concept of winning extends far beyond the mere accumulation of awards in tournament competition. In individual events, some programs emphasize the qualification of persons to national tournaments, and others stress the number of round breaks or qualifying legs earned during an academic year. Programs focusing upon debate often set achievement goals including yearly rankings or final places at a specific national tournament. Other programs stressing team performance may emphasize the overall record at state, organizational or national levels. Regardless of the goal or design adopted by a particular team, a concept of winning or reward remains an integral part of the program's operation and evolution.

The specific attitude toward achievement and winning has a significant impact upon a program's maintenance, support, and sense of educational worth. Certainly, in our very

competitive society, win records not only reflect the motivation of students, but they also arrest the attention of administrators and supporting publics. However, the forensic educator holds the critical position of balancing the dimensions by which she or he measures a program's success and of instilling an emphasis that keeps winning in an educational perspective. Just as forensics involves competition, the handling of competition has significant impact upon program evolution.

Some educators charge that as competition continues to rise, the challenge of preserving the higher goals of forensics becomes more pronounced. Durell Hamm, in a convention paper of 1993, noted: "We have seen that as the stakes for competing have risen dramatically, the educational aspects of the activity have fallen away and are replaced by a dedication to victory at all costs" (p. 14). While Hamm's observation certainly signals a danger that ethical programs want to avoid, alert forensic educators quickly discern that with the erosion of educational perspective and purpose, the "win at any cost" mentality contributes to the negative evolution of local programs.

The Funding Imperative

Often the overriding evolutionary force affecting many programs is simply the issue of funding. While exceptional circumstances allow some forensic teams to be relatively free from barriers linked to budget limitations, many programs face the continued necessity of defending and justifying

allocations. Such programs must not only "sell" university administrators upon the worth of forensics, but they must also calculate the best possible return for dollars invested and even engage in active fund-raising efforts to enhance declining administrative investments.

Although my claim that forensic programs can exist and even grow with limited budgets, many programs continue to make competitive and educational decisions based primarily upon available funding. Nationally, as Hunt and Inch (1993) point out, despite increases in forensic budgets through 1991-92, the budgets of the year following "seem to have flattened out and projected 1993-94 budgets in many instances show a decline" (p. 23). Many forensic educators can attest to being a part of the decline observed by these researchers despite deliberate efforts to defend the value and service of forensics to students and sponsoring institutions.

As teams make choices regarding the scope and function of their programs, availability of dollars will continue to influence and determine final decisions. As some programs involve increasing numbers of students with simultaneous leveling or diminishing of funding, the needs for budget management and fundraising become increasingly clear. As forensic programs continue to evolve, many of us find strong agreement with Inch and Hunt when they write that most directors "have absolutely no difficulty selling almost anyone on the academic and intellectual values of forensics, they [we] just have trouble getting the money to implement

this philosophic commitment pragmatically in . . . program budgets" (p. 23).

Team Commitment

The words of a colleague recently related a typical educator's attitude toward team commitment when he stated: "Other aspects of a program's evolution and development usually take second-place behind a group's commitment as a team." Indeed, experienced speech educators can easily concur that while team commitment is a more subjective element than those outlined above, it must be identified as a factor that permeates and impacts many program dimensions.

While forensic coaches and directors often note that forensic teams share many common characteristics, they also observe that each group is extremely unique. Further, despite the heavy responsibilities that must be assumed by educators in building a team, the commitment of a group to its team status exerts a strong influence upon local program development. Specifically, if squad leaders are willing to earn respect in positions of leadership, and if all speakers are able to develop meaningful roles as performers and team members, evolution can take positive directions. Likewise, negative roles, and particularly a lack of peer role models, often produce a low commitment that diminishes a program's success, outreach, and sense of student fulfillment.

Conclusions and Implications

This paper has attempted to identify and explore changes at work in the developing world of collegiate forensics.

Although the individual nature of each forensic program is certainly recognized, emphasis has been given to identifying the forces that affect local program evolution. Specifically, discussion has considered the influence of diversity in competitive options, the roles of coaches and directors, philosophy and its link with inclusiveness, the concept of program success, and the roles of funding and team commitment.

With the identification of forces affecting programs, possible implications and suggestions for further consideration include:

1. Without doubt, changes will continue to impact forensics, and specific forces within and without the forensic community will have direct influence upon local program survival and development.

2. Individual forensic programs must carefully evaluate trends and options provided by forensic organizations in determining specific dimensions for local programs. Recent developments in debate hold particular implications for forensic programs attempting to involve students in comprehensive experiences.

3. Pedagogical observations and research continue to emphasize the role of educators in forensic growth. The unique functions and responsibilities of coaches and directors of forensics merit individual recognition, understanding, and emphasis.

4. Exploring forensic involvement with diverse audiences holds potential to increase the service of forensics as a thriving co-curricular activity while extending training and experience beyond the tournament setting.

5. Forensic teams, and especially coaching-directing leadership, need to evaluate the concept of success and particularly analyze winning and reward as they apply to educational forensics.

6. Finally, as forensic teams search for funding to meet increasing expenses, we who direct local programs must increase our roles to include advocacy, fund-raising, and scrutiny of alternatives in seeking to provide rewarding experiences for time and dollars invested.

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